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Subject: Mono Lake Narrative - Lee Vining Ranger station

Summary:

The site of the present Lee Vining ranger station may be the longest occupied administrative siteonthe Inyo National Forest. Archeologists identify the camp as a site for prehistoric Native Americans

We believe the first ranger Wallace Green, camped at the site in 1909 and then built a structure in which he lived. A 1917 picture of

Comments:

the ranger station shows the best info we have of that time. In 1935 the small one room office was built with the help of the CCCs. In 1941 the "A" residence was built. Large initials carved in the foundation tell us it was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps.

Mailed to:
Nicholas Faust:D51

Work done by Professor Bettinger and students found that Mono Lake Indians used the site of the lower compound at Lee Vining Ranger Station as a summer or warm weather camp site. The Paiute Indians repeatedly occupied the site as part of a seasonal base camp for hunting forays. Bedrock mortars may imply nut processing. The milling equipment and variety of implements found tend to support the view that plant collection was carried out at the site. Obsidian hydration measurements place the main use of the site between 1000 B.C and historic times. (Bettinger, ~~1985~~ 1987 ~~IS THAT RIGHT DATE, LINDA????~~) 1981

The Mono Lake District was first a part of Mono National Forest. The eastern or lower portion of the present Lee Vining Ranger Station has been used by the Forest Service with periodic improvement since 1909, when Mono National Forest was established out of lands from the Sierra Forest Reserve.

The Forest Supervisors office for the Mono National Forest was located in Minden, Nevada. There were four ranger districts with offices located at Markleeville, Bridgeport, and Lee Vining, California; and Sweetwater, Nevada. The Mono National Forest covered 796,737 acres in Alpine and Mono counties and 464,542 acres in Douglas, Lyon, and Mineral counties in Nevada for a total area of 1,261,279 acres. In 1942 the Mono National Forest was disbanded. The Mono Lake District with headquarters at Lee Vining was added to the Inyo National Forest in 1946. The other three districts were added to the Toiyabe National Forest, headquartered at Reno. CITATION

The eastern or lower portion of the present Lee Vining Ranger Station was first mentioned as a site for the Forest Service in 1916, when Margaret Calhaun's book "Pioneers of Mono Basin" talks about Wallace Green, ranger, and his camp at Lee Vining Creek.

On the Mono National Forest, pictures show us a small ranger station, home and office, was built and used by a ranger Wallace Green. Green came to the area in 1916 and the first year camped next to the stream. A picture on the district today shows the early ranger station, with a gate at its entrance. We do not know when that first structure was built, we just know that Fred Clark was the ranger at the LeeVining Creek Ranger Station from 1909, when the Mono National Forest was first established, until 1916. Wallace Green served from June 14, 1916 to March 31, 1939. (California Ranger, 1939).

THEN HIS HOUSE WAS BUILT PRIOR TO 1941, as forest records state.

BECAUSE Green left after the house/fireplace fiasco.

A historic photo found in the files at the Supervisors Office is taken from the Mono National Forest era. The date written on the page is 1917. It is called the entrance to Leevining Creek Ranger Station. An old touring car is parked in front of rail fence. A pair of upright logs support a cross log, which has a sign tacked to it which reads "Leevining Ranger Station, district ranger headquarters, information as to recreation maps, camping and fishing obtainable". A one-sided barn structure is in the background, with one tall side and one steeply-sloped side. From close examination on the ground, we believe this 1917 station was just a trifle east, or lower than the present lower compound.

The text of the 1917 report reads:

> Turning west at Mono Lake the road passes the Leevining Creek Ranger Station and the public camp ground there maintained by the Forest Service. This camp is always occupied and the campers find good fishing in adjacent Leevining Creek. A short distance above the station the road begins to climb the

famous Tioga Pass grade and Leevining Creek Falls soon come into view (Maule,N.D.).

An older house was located just east of the present residence. (Blaver,1989). It appears that a small, well built stone hut accompanied, or was used by, the occupants of the older house. The wooden frame home burned down somewhere between 1967 and 70, according to Arlene Reveal, a former resident of the "A" house.

The southern half of the present town of Lee Vining occupied Forest Service land (Reveal,1989 and Banta and Blaver,1989). Even though the Forest Service played a large role in the lives of the early settlers of the town, few of those interviewed could remember much about the early ranger station. A picture on the district shows a modest building nestled next to the creek. By carefully matching the lay of the land and large boulders, it is easy to conclude the buildings in the picture were located just past of the present lower compound at the ranger station.

Forest Service land within the town of Lee Vining was the first known land trade on the Inyo. A miner friend of Jack Reveal, district ranger at Lee Vining from 1960 to 1967, owned mining claims near Copper Mountain, which the Forest Service wanted to acquire. So the business owners in Lee Vining who had permits and wanted to buy the land on which their businesses were based, went and bought some mining claims belonging to Donald I. Segerstrom. They then traded the mining claims for the land, which basically was the southern half of the present town of Lee Vining (Reveal,1989).

As the effects of the Great Depression impacted people across the nation, President Roosevelt implemented the Civilian Conservation Corps, or the CCC, immediately after his election. It took about a month from his inauguration to the signing of the bill. Numerous public works projects were organized and funded to put able-bodied males to work.

One of the camps for the Civilian Conservation Corps was located at Coleville in northern Mono County. Camp Antelope, or Camp F-396 was occupied by Company 239 from from October 10, 1939 to June of 1941, when Company 6461 occupied the site from July 1, 1941 until May 29, 1942 when it was closed as CCC camp. Spike camps were set up from Camp Antelope, 50 miles north, to both Mammoth and Gull Lake, or perhaps Silver Lake. (Hobart,1991).

Lee Vining Ranger Station profited from the CCC programs. Augie Hess, a local resident of Lee Vining, remembers that he helped to construct the small office that Forest Service records show was built in 1935. He worked under Ernest Powell, a carpenter and Lee Vining resident. Hess recalls being paid by the Forest Service, and no records can be found, but given the time and the earlier frugality of the building efforts on a Forest Service budget, it is possible any of the Great Depression public works projects paid for the office.

No such uncertainity exists for the residence that still stands and is called the "A" house, after the blueprint used for the structure. Forest Service records date it at 1941, which coincides with the last year of active work done by the CCC camp at Antelope Valley in Coleville, Calif. Large, bold letters etched in the cement wall that is the foundation for the house, proclaims C.C.C. Financial reports also state from 1938 to 1939 that 145 days of CCC labor was spent in "Lee Vining Const."

CCC enrollees from Camp Antelope near Coleville built the ranger station complex at Lee Vining Ranger Station. Wally Green was the ranger then and he got in 'a mess of trouble over that rock fireplace. He had a fireplace built out of native stone, rather than the brick fireplace the plan called for. They censured Wally for that one. The CCC's also built the little office and the warehouse on the compound at Lee Vining (Fausett,1989).

Fausett surmised that the warehouse at the Lee Vining Ranger Station was called the garage when it was first built, because a stone structure at the north end was for gasoline and oil storage. Anthony V. Randles, who served as a conscientious objecter at Coleville from 1943 to 1945 recalled adding a fireproof oil storage shed at the north end of warehouse, now called the firehouse. Fausett said that there were different plans for warehouses, depending on the size of the ranger station. Some had 3 bays, some 4 bays etc. He pointed out that the barn was probably used for hay storage.

Bob Carlson, ranger at Mono Lake Ranger District from 1946 to ??? confirmed the story about the "A" house that cropped up among both retired FS personnel and local oldtimers.

The A house had a standard brick fireplace in its design. Wallace Green, the ranger, had been there many years and was revered by the local residents. They were happy that Wally was going to get a new house and said local residents decided they should do something nice for Wally.

There was a noted stone mason in the area who had a reputation for building fine fireplaces - one big one is the four sided fireplace in the lobby of the June Lake Lodge. Several of the local residents made trips to collect local rock, including travertine from Bridgeport for the fireplace. The local mason then constructed the fireplace with a circulating feature. I have been in many A houses with the standard fireplaces and they aren't worth a damn - no heat. The one in Lee Vining really heats, I hardly every had to use the oil heat.

On an infrequent visit from the Regional Office, Lou Barrett, Assistant Regional Forester, accompanied by Bill Maule, forest supervisor, looked at the fireplace, but it did not fit the specifications for the house. Maule agreed, but pointed out that it was better and did not cost the government and explained how it was built. Barrett was not impressed. He said, 'Mr. Maule, the fireplace does not meet the specifications.'

So the upshot was that Wally Green was furloughed without pay for a month for deviation from approved plans. The forest service lost a lot of face over that and the stonemason was unfriendly forever after. (Carlson,1989).

After much questioning of local oldtimers, it seems the stonemason who constructed those wonderful fireplaces and other rock structures, was Clarence Tellis, a Native American who later worked for Dave McCoy at Mammoth Mountain.

He is reported to have constructed the fireplaces at Tamarack Lodge and June Lake Lodge, both massive, beautiful, functional fireplaces.(Stevens,1990).

Frankie Stevens and Nan Zischank, two surviving Mammoth oldtimers, reported that Tex Cushion's wife, Ruth Mulholland Cushion, had an uncle who owned a quarry for travertine east of Casa Diablo and it may have been there that the rock in question for the ranger's fireplace was gathered. Enough oldtimers tell some version of the tale that it is verified by the telling. And it illustrates some of the resentment that swirled about the Forest Service, as the service staff assumed more responsibility and local folks were wary of its power to limit traditional uses of grazing, fishing and hunting and camping. The story about the travertine fireplace is often used to make the point of how rigid were the rules of the Forest Service.

Lee Vining locals, Elma and Harry Blaver, both remember the CCC spike camp at Gull Lake, Elma with perhaps more fondness than Harry. Elma was a teenager at that time, Harry had just moved to Lee Vining from southern California because of the lack of jobs for young men his age. He worked at a local grocery store and became acquainted with the young ladies of the area.

"The CCC got the boys off the street and it gave them something to eat. They built trails and bridges and fought fires," Harry summarized those difficult years. Elma remembers having dinner at the CCC camp up Lee Vining Creek. "The mess hall was a tent with a wood floor and canvas top. There were some very nice boys at the camp," she said.

Both Elma and Harry remember the dances at Lee Vining. The Depression did not affect the region as much as elsewhere because the City of Los Angeles had a gigantic construction project creating a tunnel to channel water south into the Owens Valley Aqueduct. Also, mining was still going strong and public works projects to improve the Tioga Pass Road, the CCC camp at Tuolumne in Yosemite and the CCC camp at Coleville all were impacting the area. All these workers would congregate in town on Saturday nights for dances, held at a dance hall run by Augie Hess's father, Gus Hess.

"After all, I was young, I didn't pay much attention to what (kind of work) they were doing. They were good dancers, that's all I was interested in," Elma said. Harry's version differs: "She was chasing the boys; I was chasing her, and no one was interested in history."

Augie Hess remembers the CCC from his perspective, too. He is Elma's brother and he loved to play baseball. The various small towns would play round robin baseball and the best team came from the CCC camp at Gull Lake. So Augie went to the camp to join the CCC's so that he could play ball with them. He stayed about a week, before the Army brass pointed out he had to register and be accepted as a CCC member.

Interestingly, the CCC camp at Coleville was used even after the CCC program petered out with the start of the Second World War. Conscientous objecters moved into the CCC camp two weeks after the CCC camp closed and continued to perform outdoor tasks for the Forest Service. The detainment camp, one of four in California for conscientious objects, was sited at Coleville in Mono County from 1943 through 1945.

> The Coleville Camp, being the base camp, was operated by the American Friends Committe, the Quakers, and housed approximately 175 conscientious objecters (to W.W.II) many of which were highly educated for that time...One of the tasks performed by this group was the felling of trees near Devil's Gate and the operation of the Camp Antelope sawmill to make the timbers for the bridges and fences that they built in the

northern county area. (Over the counter interview by Nicholas Faust)

I was stationed at Lee Vining for most of the 3 summers as a 'one-man spike camp' to assist the District Ranger. I lived in a tent between the old office and the ware house. There was a spike camp at Gull Lake which varied in sized from about half dozen to a couple of dozen men. The primary purpose was fire suppression, but some of the men did timber cruising in the surrounding area while others did construction and maintenance. (letter from Anthony V. Randles January 8, 1991.

The over-the-counter interview with Randles stated that he was assigned in 1943 to be an assistant to the Lee Vining Ranger for "whatever project needed to be done, be it construction, fire work, office activities, or search and rescue duties. I was not allowed to drive, but often rode one of the station's horses down to Lee Vining to pick up the evening mail, which used to arrive at 8 p.m."

Randles noted that the June Lake spike camp was located at what is now a portion of the parking lot for June Mountain. The spike camp was nicknamed "The Ski Club" by its 30-man crew, since the outfit is housed in an an abandoned ski lodge," an article in THE MONO LOG of July, 1942 stated. It continued, "The camp, organized primarily for fire fighting and water main installation, has just moved a dozen former CCC buildings over an eight-mile winding road from Grant Lake to a new campsite a mile north of the ski club." (paper by Nicholas Faust, Friends in the Forest.).

One wonders if the reference to Grant Lake is correct, because the CCC camp at June Lake is always called the Gull Lake spike camp. The only remaining sign is the one CCC warehouse built next to Gull Lake. Currently, it is used for storage and a work site. A reference is made to a Guard Station at June Lake, which was torn down. This may have been next to the remaining warehouse along the shore of Gull Lake, since June and Gull lakes are very close to each other.

Besides fire fighting and building a community water system, the conscientious objecters at June Lake cruised stands of Jeffrey pine near Lookout Mountain and along the Owens River. Another group of conscientious objecters had a spike camp at the former CCC camp at Mammoth Lakes. "Besides their regular fire fighting priorities, they operated and did most of the construction of the Bald Mountain fire lookout." However, just as the finishing coat of varnish was put on the floor, it burned down (Al Jones interview) and later the lookout was rebuilt of cement blocks.
(Nicholas Faust paper, Friends in the Forest.)